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From the Director's Desk

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The Gold Watch Decision

Once, the decision was easy for most of us. In many cases it was encouraged. At some time between age 62 and age 66, often at 65 with Medicare eligibility, we retired from the workaday life. We retired with Social Security benefits, a healthy pension, and some form of employer-paid health insurance. The passage was marked by a retirement party, a handshake from the boss, and a gold watch for our years of service. The question was not whether we would retire by age 66, but when.

Today, for most working men and women, the decision of when to accept that gold watch is more complicated and more difficult. For many, indeed, the question is not when to retire, but whether traditional retirement is feasible at all. Census Bureau data show an upward trend over the past 20 years in the percentage of men and women who remain in the workforce over the age of 65. For example, in 2008, 72 percent of employed men age 65 to 69 were working full-time, compared with 57 percent in 1995 and 56 percent in 1990, an astonishing difference (<http://aging.senate.gov/crs/pension34.pdf>)  .

As contributing factors, economists cite a decline in traditional pension plans, a drop in the percentage of employers that offer retiree health benefits, and the impact of the economic upheaval on individuals' and families' financial security. Retiring on a nest egg and a fixed income becomes increasingly less desirable when the nest egg is cracked, retirement benefits are calculated in large part on Social Security, and the prospect of medical bills looms.

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Two recent publications highlight concerns about aging, staying on the job vs. retirement, and physical and mental capacity. These concerns bear attention. The issues they raise are ones that we in occupational safety and health are increasingly pressed to address as more and more workers born between 1946 and 1964, the Baby Boom era, approach traditional retirement age.

In an August report, the Center for Economic and Policy Research found that employment in physically demanding jobs or in jobs with difficult working conditions is a major cause of early exit from the labor market among older workers. This trend has particular implications as policymakers eye the prospect of raising the age for full Social Security benefits beyond 66 as a way of keeping the program more solvent.

“Raising the retirement age is particularly concerning for near-retirement age workers with [physically demanding] jobs,” the Center said. “Despite the fact that the retirement age increase is supposed to encourage workers to work longer, many workers would be physically unable to extend work lives in their jobs, and they would most likely be left with no choice but to receive reduced benefits” (<http://www.cepr.net/index.php/publications/reports/patterns-in-physically-demanding-labor-among-older-workers>) [↗](#).

Of 18.8 million workers age 58 and older, nearly 35 percent, or about 6.5 million, were in physically demanding jobs in 2009, about 5 percent of which required high physical demand, the Center reported. The Center’s definition of a physically demanding job or one with difficult working conditions includes occupations that we would immediately think of in terms of manually handling heavy loads or staying in near-constant motion, such as construction laborers, freight handlers, and housekeepers. It also encompasses some that might not come to mind as quickly, such as teachers, retail clerks, and food service managers.

In the Center’s analysis, a large proportion of physically demanding jobs are concentrated among low-wage, less educated workers. For this demographic, the prospect is particularly bleak: retiring on severely limited means; trying to find another less physically stressful occupation in competition with younger, better prepared workers; or remaining in the current job with its risks of stress, strain, exhaustion, and injury.

Interestingly, even for those who are financially comfortable, other recent research suggests that retirement may not always be “blest retirement,” in the words of the English author Oliver Goldsmith. In a study published in the Winter 2010 Journal of Economic Perspectives, researchers found a significant association between early retirement and a decline in cognitive ability among people in their early 60s (<http://www.aeaweb.org/articles.php?doi=10.1257/jep.24.1.119>) [↗](#).

These data may reflect the adage of “use it or lost it,” providing statistical evidence for the idea that when one is not mentally or intellectually stimulated, his or her cognitive abilities begin to decline, the authors hypothesize. This is the other side of the coin in the issue of work and aging: Some older workers may prefer remaining in the job market over retiring. They enjoy the mental or physical challenge. Their coworkers are their social network. They are equal to at least the minimal demands of the job. They fear that retirement will be lonely and dull: a slow mental death.

These issues of work and aging demand our attention as occupational safety and health professionals. The need is clear: to help match the design and performance of work in the second decade of the 21st Century with the needs and capabilities of all workers—with careful attention to conditions that can become increasingly stressful and dangerous as

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the worker ages. This involves keeping work safe and healthy for workers who already qualify for senior citizen discounts. It also involves ongoing analysis and action to facilitate healthy aging at work and to promote a sustainable U.S. workforce: reducing occupational risk factors that impose wear and tear on the body over time and using the workplace as a forum to promote personal health.

NIOSH and its partners are committed to the research and information dissemination that are critical for realizing those goals. Last year, with the Society of Occupational and Environmental Health and other stakeholders, we cosponsored a national workshop to examine critical needs regarding healthy aging and a sustainable workforce and reported findings and recommendations (http://www.soeh.org/pdf/AgingWorkersWorkshopReport_11%2009_Final.pdf)  .

In our WorkLife program, now in its seventh year, we work with diverse partners to plan, conduct, and evaluate research for sustaining and improving worker health through better work-based programs, policies, and practices (</niosh/worklife/>). I am proud that we have contributed to national and global efforts to enable a safe, healthy, and sustainable workforce, including the development of recommendations on essential elements of healthy workplace programs (</niosh/worklife/essentials.html>).

As we continue our efforts, I invite you to read and use the resources described above. We hope you will join us in helping to make the gold watch decision a voluntary, happy, and fulfilling one for every worker.

Get the 4-1-1 on the Upcoming Flu Season

October marks the beginning of the 2010-2011 influenza season. NIOSH has released a new topic page on influenza, which will be updated and expanded to include a variety of resources for employers, workers, occupational health professionals, and other partners. Watch for additions soon (</niosh/topics/flu>).

Dr. Howard on Medscape: Deepwater Horizon Challenges

In a video interview posted by Medscape.com on October 1, NIOSH Director John Howard, M.D., discusses the needs and challenges that were involved in protecting response workers from work-related hazards during the Deepwater Horizon emergency. <http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/729420> .

MSHA Cites NIOSH Research for New Emergency Temporary Rock Dust Standard

On September 21, the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) cited NIOSH research as part of its supporting technical evidence in announcing a new emergency temporary standard requiring mine operators to increase the proportion of inert rock dust in the mixture of airborne rock dust and combustible coal dust in coal mines (<http://www.msha.gov/MEDIA/PRESS/2010/NR100921.asp>) . The decision for the emergency standard was based in part on NIOSH's publication of recommendations for a new rock dust standard to prevent coal dust explosions in intake airways. (</niosh/mining/pubs/pubreference/outputid2825.htm>).

New NIOSH Report on Deepwater Horizon Response Available

The sixth report in a series of interim reports from the NIOSH health hazard evaluation of Deepwater Horizon response workers was issued September 13. To read the full report and view updates on this health hazard evaluation, visit </niosh/topics/oilspillresponse/gulfspillhhe.html>.

Call For Abstracts: National Occupational Injury Research Symposium

The fifth National Occupational Injury Research Symposium (NOIRS) will be held on October 18-20, 2011, at the Waterfront Hotel in Morgantown, West Virginia. NOIRS 2011 is a national forum for the presentation of the latest findings and methods in occupational injury research. Abstracts of 300 words or less are invited across all industry sectors in areas that include, but are not limited to, motor vehicle safety; fall prevention; workplace violence; machine safety; business case/economics of injury; work hours, fatigue, sleep; safety culture and work injury; injury surveillance; intervention evaluation; risk factor identification; research to practice; injury prevention technology and innovation; and high risk and vulnerable worker groups. For further information or to submit an abstract go to [/niosh/noirs/2011/](#) or contact Jim Collins at JCollins1@cdc.gov.

Alaska Health Department Reports NIOSH Air Crash Findings

A September 22 State of Alaska Epidemiology Bulletin from the state Department of Health and Social Services reports latest statistics by NIOSH on civilian aircraft crashes in the state, factors likely associated with crashes, and recommendations for ongoing efforts to prevent crashes. http://www.epi.alaska.gov/bulletins/docs/b2010_30.pdf  

NIOSH Establishes Nanotechnology Research Partnership

NIOSH and a university-based nanotechnology research center announced a formal agreement on September 22 to provide companies with practical research and guidance to promote occupational health and safety in nanotechnology. [/niosh/updates/upd-09-22-10.html](#)

NIOSH Convenes Workshop on Indium and Occupational Lung Disease

In September the NIOSH Division of Respiratory Disease Studies sponsored an international [indium](#) workshop in Morgantown, West Virginia, that brought together experienced clinicians, epidemiologists, industrial hygienists, and occupational public health practitioners from countries where indium is processed or used in order to better understand and address the emerging occupational health issue of indium-related lung disease. Workshop participants (1) reviewed the clinical characteristics, pathological features, and radiological findings of all cases of lung disease reported to date; (2) discussed current best practices for disease prevention and monitoring; and (3) identified outstanding questions and research needs to guide future studies. For more information on NIOSH's research, see the March 2010 issue of eNews. [/niosh/enews/enewsV7N11.html#g](#)

NIOSH Congratulates Dr. Sherry Baron

Sherry Baron, MD, MPH, of NIOSH was one of the recipients of the 2010 American Public Health Association Occupational Health and Safety Section Awards. Dr. Baron, the NIOSH coordinator for Occupational Health Disparities, was recognized for her extensive career, especially her work in championing the occupational health disparities field, her work with immigrant and low wage workers, and her work in Mexico. More information and a full list of award recipients are available at <http://www.apha.org/NR/rdonlyres/F7D03758-A460-49F1-BACC-C72BFD359CEB/0/2010Awardsfinal1.pdf>  .

In Memoriam: William E. Murray, Jr.

NIOSH and CDC have lost a great public health officer, mentor, health physicist, and communicator. Retired CAPT William E. Murray, Jr., passed away on September 15. Bill retired from the U.S. Public Health Service in 1998 and then joined the Oak Ridge Associated University where he assisted the NIOSH efforts in the Division of Compensation Analysis and Support for the next 10 years. His initial NIOSH assignments in the 1970s in radiation health and training served him well

in leading NIOSH's assessment of worker exposures to nonionizing radiation in what is now the NIOSH Division of Applied Research and Technology. He completed his NIOSH assignments within the leadership of the newly created Health-Related Energy Research Branch.

News from Our Partners

Dialing, Talking, Texting ... Know the Hazards of Driver Distraction

In August, the Oregon Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (OR-FACE) Program published a safety brochure on cell phones and driver distraction at the request of safety trainers at SAIF, the state's principal workers' compensation insurer. The brochure titled *Dialing, Talking, Texting ... Know the Hazards of Driver Distraction* discusses distractions common to both handheld and handsfree phones and presents a table of relative risk ratios for the most common distractions. Other driver impairments are summarized, including mental distraction, use of alcohol, drowsiness, and not using a seatbelt. The brochure and other safety materials are available at <http://www.ohsu.edu/croet/face> .

PAHO Seeking Workers' Health Advisor

The Pan American Health Organization has a vacancy for a workers' health advisor in the Area of Sustainable Development and Environmental Health located in Washington DC. Applications are due October 11. More information is available at https://erecruit.who.int/public/hrd-cl-vac-view.asp?o_c=1000&jobinfo_uid_c=22885&vacLng=en .

New Study Seeks Female Nurse Volunteers

The Nurses' Health Study III is currently recruiting female nurses, between the ages of 22 and 45 to participate in a study to help researchers learn more about the health of working women from diverse ethnic backgrounds. NIOSH is partnering with this new study to learn more about how working women's lifestyles and occupational exposures during their 20's, 30's and 40's can influence health throughout life. More information at <http://nhs3.org/>  or <http://www.facebook.com/NHS3.org>.

Global Happenings

Occupational Safety and Health Postdoctoral Fellowship Opportunity

The Institut de recherche Robert-Sauvé en santé et en sécurité du travail (IRSST) announces a new guest postdoctoral fellowship. The fellowship is designed to assist new researchers who hold a Ph.D. from a university outside Quebec and wish to do their postdoctoral research in occupational health and safety at the IRSST in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The fellowship is for \$30K. The deadline for applications is October 20. For more information, go to <http://www.irsst.qc.ca/en/scholarships-home.html> .

Health Hazard Evaluations (HHE)

New Report Available: Crystalline Silica and Isocyanate Exposures During Parking Garage Repair



The HHE Program responded to a request to determine if employees were adequately protected against silica and methylenebis (phenyl isocyanate) (MDI) exposures during parking garage repair. HHE Program investigators found that employees were overexposed to crystalline silica while jackhammering and sandblasting and therefore recommended that the use of respirators and eye protection be required during these tasks. NIOSH recommended that managers explore possible engineering controls to reduce dust levels while jackhammering and sandblasting. Investigators also determined that employees may be exposed to MDI through skin contact and should wear butyl rubber gloves when mixing compounds to minimize exposures. </niosh/hhe/reports/pdfs/2008-0058-3108.pdf> 

NORA

Draft National Oil and Gas Extraction Agenda

The NORA Oil and Gas Extraction Council requests comments on their draft national agenda (</niosh/docket/review/docket213/>). The agenda consists of five strategic goals covering the major exposures and causes of injuries and fatalities. The Council also seeks organizations to join partnership efforts to advance the draft priorities. For more information, contact the NORA coordinator (noracoordinator@cdc.gov).

r2p Corner

NIOSH Twitter Site Launched for Manufacturing Community



Follow NIOSH and the Manufacturing Sector on Twitter to stay connected with the National Occupational Research Agenda (<http://twitter.com/NIOSHManuf>). Tweets provide information related to occupational safety and health research and interventions for manufacturing, including partnerships, publications, facts, statistics, news, and conferences. For more information on the site or to learn more about the NIOSH Manufacturing Research Program, contact Michael Baskett (MBaskett@cdc.gov) or Greg Lotz (WLotz@cdc.gov) or visit the NIOSH Manufacturing topic page at </niosh/programs/manuf>.

What's new on the NIOSH Science Blog?

OSH in the Movies: This Time it's Personal

NIOSH received a tremendous response to the Blog earlier this year on job safety and health issues in the movies (/niosh/blog/nsb031610_movies.html). A new Blog continues with "Top 10" lists based on reader suggestions. And the winners are... </niosh/blog/>.

New NIOSH Health and Safety Topic Pages

Ni Is for Nickel

A collection of NIOSH and other external resources for working safely with nickel. </niosh/topics/nickel/>

Deciphering the Exposome

Read how exposures from our environment, diet, lifestyle, and other factors interact with our own unique characteristics such as genetics, physiology, and epigenetic makeup, resulting in disease. </niosh/topics/exposome/>

Upcoming Conferences & Workshops

ASTM International Symposium on Surface and Dermal Sampling

October 14-15, San Antonio, TX. <http://www.astm.org/D22symp1010.htm> 

138th Annual Meeting and Exposition of the American Public Health Association

November 6-10, Denver, CO. <http://www.apha.org/meetings/> 

Annual National Ergonomics Conference and Exposition (ErgoExpo)

November 30-December 3, Las Vegas, NV. <http://www.ergoexpo.com/> 

Musculoskeletal Disorders and Chronic Pain Conference

February 10-12, 2011, Los Angeles, CA. <http://www.cirpd.org/conference2011/> 

A comprehensive list of upcoming conferences can be found at </niosh/exhibits.html>.

Word of the Month

Indium—Indium is a silvery, malleable, fusible, chiefly trivalent metallic element that occurs in sphalerite ores and is used as a plating material, in alloys, and in electronics (such as LCD screens and TVs). <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/indium> .

Please send your comments and suggestions to us at nioshnews@cdc.gov.

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